

Nebraska Broadband Initiative - Highlighted Success Stories during Quarter 1 2014

SUCCESS STORIES FOR BUILDING CAPACITY ---

Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska: A Follow-up Study

The survey, "Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska: A Follow-up Study," tracks progress made since a 2010 survey that asked about Nebraskans' current use of technology, their opinions about community technology resources and their technology training needs.

The 14-page survey was mailed to approximately 8,000 households (8,024 deliverable households out of the 9,000 initial list). A 35% response rate was achieved. Some preliminary findings include: More than eight in ten Nebraska households (82%) currently have broadband Internet service compared to 76% households in 2010. Although elderly and low-income Nebraskans continue to lag behind other demographic groups in Internet access, they have made significant gains in the last four years, according to a new survey.

During the past four years the proportion of persons age 65 and older having broadband service at home increased from 48 percent to 64 percent. And, the proportion of persons with the lowest household incomes having broadband service at home increased from 44 percent to 53 percent. The complete report was presented to the Public Service Commission and released in April 2014. The full report is available at <http://broadband.nebraska.gov>.

Broadband Business Efforts

The Nebraska Broadband Initiative in 2013 launched a new effort to help Nebraska businesses increase their economic vitality by understanding how to more effectively use broadband technologies. Key points of this initiative include:

- *Benchmarking Data* - Gather data through a business assessment to establish initial benchmarks and measure impact.
- *Providing Resources to Businesses* - Help individual businesses understand how they can use broadband to increase their economic vitality and to understand their ROI and assist them in identifying steps for implementation.
- *Building Capacity* - Build capacity in Nebraska for business coaches (i.e., economic developers, extension educators and Department of Economic Development field staff) to work with businesses and communities to better utilize broadband.

The Nebraska Broadband Initiative partnered with Strategic Networks Group (SNG) to conduct a survey of Nebraska businesses on their use of broadband technologies in the fall of 2013. Over 1,100 organizations (881 businesses) completed the SNG business survey assessment launched in September 2013. ***Nebraska businesses are utilizing technology applications such as teleworking and selling goods/services more than other states that have been surveyed by SNG.*** Responses show that broadband is being widely used and is benefiting businesses across the state. For example:

- Broadband use is having a positive impact on jobs, with 364 respondents reporting a net increase of 654 jobs due to using the Internet. Over 50% of net jobs reported by respondents were attributed to use of the Internet.

- Broadband use is also having a positive impact on business revenue with typical respondents reporting 25 to 45 percent of revenue from the Internet.
- Cost savings of 4 percent were reported by respondents.

Businesses that participated in the survey are being connected to resources to help them better understand how broadband can increase economic vitality and to understand their ROI and assist them in identifying steps for implementation. Up to 500 businesses will receive a personalized scorecard comparing your their company's use of broadband with peer businesses in Nebraska and all across the nation. The scorecard will provide recommendations for improving profitability and expanding business operations through the utilization of technology. In addition, coaches have been identified to meet with businesses to review the scorecard and assist businesses in moving forward.

Promotional efforts led to this tv news report that broadband is a necessity.

<http://www.khastv.com/story/businesses-say-broadband-internet-is-a-necessity-20140312>

SUCCESS STORIES FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Regional Tech Fairs

Taking expert resources on broadband technology utilization to regions across the state was a goal of the Regional Workshops/Tech Fairs. Over 140 businesses/organizations attended eight technology fairs held regionally. The fairs featured opportunities for business owners, ag producers and communities to learn about how to utilize broadband/technology. Topics included remote video (security and monitoring), cloud computing, security, mobile technology and innovative technologies. Seven-ten minute videos have been created for each topic that are available at broadband.nebraska.gov.

Following are comments shared by attendees:

- We wanted to move to the cloud and many of my questions were answered. And, I have a contact name.
- The security information was very helpful and just what I needed to know.
- We were considering using remote sensing in our business and after the session understand how it can be of value to our business
- The mapping information is just what I needed. Many of our clientele live outside of the community and now I have a resource to help find a service.
- Individual whose business scored more than an 8 – when leaving said Wow – lot of good information.
- Another had a business idea of helping ag producers with remote sensing that could be incorporated into their fields - would save them time and money!

This quote provided by one participant, shares how impactful it was to have experts available at the fair. *“I recently attended the Broadband Technology Fair at Mid Plains Community College. I thought it was going to be very “techy” and completely over my head but I was very excited to come away with so many new tools and ideas to implement at Pro Printing and Graphics. We’re looking forward to integrating new mobile tools and project management programs presented at the Fair” – Nichole Ediger, Pro Printing & Graphics*

Key to the success of this effort was the collaboration of the Broadband Initiative partners and UNL Ed Media in attending the sessions, encouraging attendance and sharing expertise.

SUCCESS STORIES FOR PLANNING

The Nebraska Broadband Initiative has been successful at gathering input from citizens across the State of Nebraska to inform the Regional and Statewide Plans. This has included:

- Over 300 people participating in 8 regional forums located statewide.
- Planning committees formed that included over 80 members.
- 17 focus groups with 105 individuals participating conducted in 2012.
- Over 300 youth participated in an assessment through their high schools
- Over 1,000 businesses/organizations responded to an assessment in understanding how businesses incorporate broadband and technology.
- A household survey conducted in 2010 mailed to 6,600 Nebraskans achieved a 47% response rate and a follow-up survey mailed to 8,000 Nebraskans achieved a 35% response rate.

This has led to the 8 regional plans completed in 2013. Priorities consistent across the regions include: Digital Literacy and Adoption/Advanced Technology Training; Broadband Availability and Affordability; Economic Development and Agriculture. These priorities are now the basis of the Statewide Plan.

The youth perspective is one demographic that we had limited input Statewide outside of the Northeast region. This limited assessment found students using broadband in their daily lives. In addition, 65% said they would be enticed to move to a community that had broadband available.

At the request of the Nebraska Public Service Commissioners, efforts were made to gain further perspective from the youth. The Broadband Initiative had a presence at both the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) annual conferences where over 300 youth were asked how satisfied they are with their internet access and two additional open ended questions asking why the internet is important to them and what needs to be improved. Youth overall were satisfied with their broadband connection with 68.4% of the FBLA youth indicating that they were satisfied compared to 75% of the FFA youth. This was surprising given the higher representation from rural communities at the FFA Conference with 66% living outside of a town and at the FBLA Conference 34% living outside of a town. In speaking with the youth, a number shared that the connection has improved in the last two years at their homes and school.

Consistently youth commented on the survey that there was a need for higher speed and consistent service especially for those living outside of city limits. Homework was the primary reason youth accessed the internet followed by entertainment. Using the internet is part of the youth daily life. They expect the service to be there. Youth were also videotaped sharing additional plans which will be shared in conjunction with the Statewide Plan.

All broadband initiative organizations were engaged in the gathering of data for input towards the broadband plan. One organization may have taken a lead in an effort but all organizations provided feedback, assistance and support in planning and implementation. The FFA and FBLA conferences are one recent example of pulling together to gather additional feedback.